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UNCLAS RANGOON 000078

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP AND INL
BANGKOK FOR NAS
DEA FOR OF AND OFF

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: SNAR BM

SUBJECT: EVALUATION OF THE WA ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

REF: A. 02 RANGOON 0114
 1B. UNVIE VIENNA 0285
 1C. 02 RANGOON 1547

¶1. This is an action message. See paragraph 7.

¶2. Summary: The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has invited the USG to participate in the final evaluation of the Wa Alternative Development Project. We have been the prime movers behind this project. If possible, we should plan to participate in the evaluation. End Summary.

¶3. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has invited the United States and other major donors to the Wa Alternative Development Project to participate (at their own expense) in the project's final evaluation. UNODC has contracted for two international and one independent Burmese experts to conduct the evaluation from March 7 to April 3, 2003. Donor experts (one each) would complement that team.

¶4. We recommend that the USG accept the invitation. The United States has been the prime donor for the Wa Alternative Development Project. While other donors (Italy, Germany, and Japan) have lately stepped in to pick up some of the financial burden, the United States has contributed about two-thirds of the project's \$11 million cost over the past four years. Simple prudence dictates that we ensure that those funds were well spent.

¶5. Secondly, there may be lessons to be learned from the project, which appears to have done relatively well in an extraordinarily short period, despite the stress induced by cuts in donor support in 2001. Through the end of 2002, the project had hit its targets for opium reduction, health, and education, and was opening up a new phase (through the construction of a Japanese financed canal in the Nam Kar basin) that may allow it to entirely close the food deficit in the project area. That is a fairly remarkable performance for a project that was executed under extraordinarily difficult circumstances.

¶6. Thirdly, UNODC has proposed extending and expanding its alternative development projects in Burma as part of its next five year plan, starting in 2004. That plan calls for extending the Wa Alternative Development Project through 2008 and expanding its coverage to areas in the Wa territories north of Pang Sang and into areas controlled by the Kokang Chinese. Both areas are major centers of opium production and operations in them will require a major expansion of UNODC's budget in Burma. Before the United States commits support for that effort, we should be certain that the current approach is both appropriate and effective.

¶7. Action requested: Designation of a U.S. expert to participate in UNODC's evaluation of the Wa Alternative Development Project from March 7 to April 3, 2003.

McMullen